

My name is Shaylah McQueen 2012, Valedictorian of James Hillhouse High School in New Haven, CT. I was also a member of the Supports for Pregnant and Parenting Teens program (SPPT) held at my High School. The SPPT program meant more to me than I initially expected it to be. I have always been involved in other programs geared towards mentorship, parenting, counseling, but they weren't as efficient as they were cut out to be. I can honestly say that the SPPT staff met my needs. In fact, they did more than meet my needs. They assisted me with the following services: daycare services including transportation to and from home, daycare and high school; assistance with social services; the Raising Readers weekly group sessions that fosters an early reading development between me and my child and guidance with the college admission process.

The SPPT staff were my personal cheerleaders that encouraged me at the most critical times when I felt like I was worthless and didn't belong at my high school or the world overall. But participating in such a program made me feel a part of a community that I fit in with, which was a community that was there to help teens in my situation, in being a teen parent. I used to think that being a teen mother was a disadvantage, a curse. However, I have realized with the help of the SPPT program that it is a privilege and a blessing because being a mom is more than teaching a child, it is teaching yourself how to live to your utmost potential. If I aborted my son like I had originally planned, I would have thrown away my destiny. Here I thought, I was giving up my life, but I was really giving birth to it or him. If God did not bless me with such a family as the SPPT program I would not be writing you today as a Gates Millennium Scholar and Wilson College student mother who was given the opportunity to bring my child along on campus with me. I mean what I say because it was through the SPPT program and their resources that made me aware of educational institutions where moms and their child could receive a quality education together and the scholarship opportunities that have made this dream possible.

Wilson College is a beautiful place surrounded with beautiful people. My son loves it there. By taking my son with me, it has opened many doors for him and I am so grateful to have offered him such an opportunity that I was not given when I was a child. This opportunity is a chance to live a rich life that is surrounded with a surplus of resources and friendly people willing to offer a hand. Though I am young, I believe in the saying it takes a village to raise a child. That is why I feel it is my duty to give thanks and recognition to the village: my community, my Hillhouse family, and SPPT family that helped keep me grounded.

Thank you for investing in me and my son's present and future success.